

Bankruptcy on Africa

By Graham Hovey

United States policy for southern Africa has arrived at dead end. The conspicuous failure of Washington's covert intervention in Angola ought to have made this clear to everyone.

This country must now try to make a fresh start in a part of the world that cannot be ignored, an area largely out of control that has become an object of outside intervention and great-power involvement. It is an area that harbors the rapidly rising risk of catastrophic racial war.

It will not be easy to make a fresh start because the hour is late in the southern African tragedy and because American policy, founded on incredibly wrong premises, was bankrupt long before the Angolan disaster.

Many ingredients helped to bankrupt the policy: our own racism and lingering notions of "white supremacy"; business investments in South Africa, Rhodesia and Angola; obsessive hostility for any program that sounded like Communism; obsessive concern for "stability" and benevolence toward regimes, black or white, that promised it.

But the basic premises on which a bankrupt policy was built were those contained in the notorious Option Two of National Security Study Memorandum 39, recommended to President Nixon in 1969 by Henry A. Kissinger. Here was the "tilt" toward white-minority Governments of South Africa and Rhodesia and a Portuguese regime still determined to remain in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.

Option Two called for the United States in southern Africa to "maintain public opposition to racial repression, but relax political isolation and economic restrictions on the white states." Its premise: "The whites are here to stay and the only way that constructive change can come about is through them."

In the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, the premises for southern Africa were that white minority rule was not — could not possibly be — "here to stay," and that one catalyst for peaceful, rather than violent, progress toward self-determination and majority governments was steady American pressure on the white rulers to accept significant changes while there still was time.

Option Two explains why the Nixon White House, with Mr. Kissinger directing the strategy, made no effort in 1971 to block the Byrd Amendment, which placed the United States in breach of the United Nations sanctions against Rhodesia's racist regime for which this country had voted.

It explains why the White House gave only lip service to subsequent efforts to repeal this cynical legislation that weakened the United Nations and dealt a savage blow at United States credibility with more than just the black Africans.

Mr. Kissinger's Option Two premise was exploded in the overthrow of Portugal's fascist regime in April of 1974 by an army weary of unwinnable colonial wars and determined to negotiate promptly with the liberation movements for the independence of the African territories.

But the attitude underlying Option Two—the philosophy that had governed the actual, as opposed to the rhetorical, American policy in southern Africa since 1969—explains why the American effort in Angola was probably doomed from the outset, whatever Congress did about aid.

It was late in the game for American aid to any liberation movement, but the Soviet Union had been there all along. As an African church leader explained to a newsman, "The Soviets have had a historical involvement with the African liberation struggle against the Portuguese, while the United States was on the other side."

Most black Africans thus viewed American aid for Holden Roberto's National Front as simply a move to counter Soviet assistance for the Popular Movement and an effort to bolster Washington's client and Roberto's sponsor, President Mobutu of Zaire.

American aid for Jonas M. Savimbi's National Union in southern Angola coincided with the intervention of white South African soldiers, provoking black African hostility for Savimbi and suspicions of an American-South African alliance.

Black Africans are disturbed by the massive Soviet-Cuban intervention in Angola, but in light of recent history they will not equate it with a lesser intervention by South Africa's white regime, which most of them regard as Enemy No. 1.

The scene now shifts to Rhodesia, where an expanded guerrilla struggle is gaining momentum against the white regime that Option Two has helped to survive; a regime that is still resisting realistic negotiations looking to majority rule. At the same time, Secretary Kissinger is preparing for his first visit to Africa.

Unless he is ready to tell black African leaders that Option Two was really no option at all and that the "tilt" toward the white minority governments was a ghastly mistake, he ought to stay home.

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